

A
S E R M O N

Preached at the VISITATION

OF

The Right Reverend Father in God,

J O H N

Lord Bishop of WINCHESTER:

Held at KINGSTON upon THAMES,

ON

THURSDAY, the twenty-third of MAY, 1765.

BY THOMAS HERRING, M. A.

Prebendary of YORK, and Rector of CULLESDEN, SURRY.

Admonere volumus, non mordere: prodesse, non lædere.

ERASMUS.

L O N D O N,

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MDCCLXV.



To the Right Reverend Father in God,

J O H N

Lord Bishop of WINCHESTER: &c.

MY LORD,

AT the same time that I give the following discourse to the world, with that anxious diffidence, which it would ill become me not to feel, on this occasion; I trust so far to the merit of good intentions, as to address it to Your Lordship, even without Your consent: well knowing, that integrity is sure to find protection in a candid breast.

MAY You ever be happy, MY LORD, both in the high honours of Your distinguished rank, and in the calmer comforts of social life. And may the clergy of the diocese of WINCHESTER enjoy with gratitude the valuable blessing, of so mild a governor, and so benevolent a friend. I am,

MY LORD,

YOUR LORDSHIP'S

dutiful servant

THOMAS HERRING.

I TIMOTHY IV. 16.

Take heed unto thyself, and unto thy doctrine.

AT the time when St. *Paul* wrote his two epistles to *Timothy*, he seems to have looked upon himself as drawing towards the grave. They may therefore be considered as the farewell lessons of a great and experienced apostle, to a disciple many years younger than himself; and who, being lately become a convert to the Christian religion, would unavoidably stand in need of advice how to behave, both in his private and his public character. And accordingly we find, in the course of the two epistles, a great number of precepts collected for the use of *Timothy*, in order to obviate every difficulty that might happen to distress him, in going through the duties of his ministry.

HERE I shall drop the particular history of my text: and, that we may come more
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home to the occasion which has called us together at this time, shall only endeavour to explain and inforce the general purport of the apostle's advice, so far as it seems applicable to Us. And this I intend to do, by considering, first, what is meant by taking heed unto ourselves: and secondly, what is meant by taking heed unto our doctrine.

It plainly appears, at first view, that by taking heed to ourselves, is meant that example, which every Christian minister is bound in duty to set to the rest of mankind: without which, the most pathetic admonitions from the pulpit will make but slight impression on the minds of our hearers; and be considered rather as the exercise of our fancy, than the language of the heart. For the world will of course judge of the *doctrine*, by the *man*: and whatever credit we may ^{chance}~~change~~ to gain as scholars, we shall find but few advocates for our sincerity, and fewer still, I doubt, who will receive our advice, either with attention or improvement. “Neque enim tantum id
“dico (says *Quintilian*) eum qui fit orator,
4 “virum

“virum bonum esse oportere: sed ne futurum quidem oratorem, nisi virum bonum.”

He seems to have thought it impossible for a man to raise the attention of his hearers, and warm their minds with a love of what is just and honest, while his conduct evidently contradicts his precepts. And we may observe, that St. *Paul*, towards the end of the chapter from which I have taken the words of my text, exhorts *Timothy* to be “an EXAMPLE of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

I do not in the least suspect that they before whom I now stand, need any degree of persuasion to put the apostle's advice in practice: and yet you will give me leave, for my own sake as much as for yours, to dwell a little on one or two points of behaviour, which more immediately concern the ministers of the Gospel.

THE first particular that I would mention, and which seems indeed to be the foundation of every thing else, is a strict

piety and devotion, both in public and private. I would not be thought to mean, that we are, by our *profession*, shut out from the innocent pleasures and amusements of life; or that piety consists in a severe brow, and a dejected countenance: certainly there is something in a consciousness of acting up to our duty, and being at peace with *God*, that raises in the mind a perpetual fund of chearfulness, and never fails to produce that inward tranquillity, which is the natural effect of innocence and virtue. The man who is blessed with this admirable frame of temper, is always even and unruffled: he is an utter stranger to the gloom and severity of the cloyster; and comes with an additional relish to those numberless blessings and gifts of nature, of which the vicious and debauched can possibly have no taste. In a word; we are so far from forfeiting our title to the pleasures of life, by living in a course of piety and devotion, that these are the only persons who can properly be said to enjoy them, and this the only religion that any man, in his sober senses, can either practise himself, or recommend to the practice

tice of others: clear of the vain parade of pharisaical righteousness, and unpolluted by immorality. Let virtue therefore, and the peace that flows from virtue, be our guide and our comfort. Let us endeavour to promote the interests of religion by that best of lessons, an irreproachable life: and be patterns of sound doctrine and sincere piety, both in what we preach, and in what we practise.

AND while we are thus solicitous about regulating our conduct in general, we must remember likewise not to be remiss in the public administration of our office. Our attendance on divine service should be performed with a composed and serious behaviour: such as may plainly shew that we are in earnest, and deeply affected with what we are about; and with that warmth too, which naturally flows from a heart full of gratitude and piety.

It is no part of my design to recommend to you that immoderate degree of zeal, which carries us, in all appearance, besides
 I ourselves,

ourselves, and distorts every feature of the face: actions of this kind are justly suspected, because they are easily practised; and after striving to appear more devout than those around us, we may chance to pass for hypocrites with every sober man; and they who are disposed to laugh at all ceremony and religion, can never be furnished with a better subject for ridicule, than the singularity of such a character.

WHEN we are retired to the closet, we may there offer up our prayers to Almighty God with what earnestness we think proper. But no one need be told, that we live in an age far from favourable to any uncommon strains of devotion; or that the most likely method of keeping religion clear of contempt and reproach, is by a calmer degree of zeal, in the public discharge of our duty, and by not running into any enthusiastic emotions; which, at the best, flow more from the constitution than the heart, and are the workings rather of an extravagant cast of mind, than the result of rational piety.

THERE

THERE is one thing more, which I would recommend to our serious consideration, under this first head of my discourse, and that is charity: without which, we shall be very far from a just performance of our duty, even as Men; and much farther still as Christians, and ministers of the most benevolent religion in the world.

It may perhaps be said (and I fear with too much truth) that many of us have no abilities for the exercise of this virtue: and that, notwithstanding we feel the highest degree of concern for a brother in want, it is nevertheless out of our power to relieve him. There is no answer to be given to this sad excuse! and perhaps, under these circumstances, a humane and compassionate disposition is hardly to be esteemed a blessing. And yet, even in this lowly state, we are by no means shut out from doing good: we may visit the sick; comfort the afflicted; and instruct the children of the poor; who are as likely to suffer from ignorance as from poverty. I need not urge, in this assembly,
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the great importance of a virtuous education; nor how much it is our interest, as well as our duty, to train up the children of the poor (so far as they properly become our care) in a course of industry and virtue. If any one is of opinion that this point may be neglected, without interrupting the peace of society, let him only observe how our prisons are crowded with the most abandoned characters; what inhuman outrages are committed daily in our streets; what pains and expence we are at to secure our property from idle vagabonds; and, above all, what numbers of unhappy wretches suffer death, for the most enormous crimes, by the hand of public justice! These are facts that can escape no man's observation: and it is equally well known, that hardly any one of these unfortunate people ever went out of the world, without laying all his bad conduct, and his untimely end, to the want of wholesome instruction in his tender years. And where, let me ask, is the wonder? certainly the mind suffers as much from nakedness as the body; and should we throw all the other advantages of life into the
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the opposite scale, they would never outweigh the want of education. I proceed now, in the second place, to consider what is meant by taking heed unto our doctrine.

THIS is a point which no less demands our most serious attention than the former. Indeed it is a matter of the highest importance: and if there were either opportunity, or occasion for doing it, the time would be well spent in duly weighing the several branches, of which this duty is composed. But this being much too large a plan for the present purpose, I shall confine myself to one or two general observations.

It has often been said, that we frequently make choice of such texts of scripture, for the subjects of our discourses in public, and treat them in such a manner, that none but scholars, and persons of a refined education, can possibly receive any advantage from what we preach.

THIS remark most nearly concerns us at the time when we first enter upon our office.

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At setting out, we are apt to be over-fond of shewing the world, what we have read at the college: and the sentiments which we deliver from the pulpit, are sometimes not only too refined in themselves, but are likewise expressed in too exalted and declamatory a style.

I THINK myself safe in condemning what every sensible man is sure to dislike, one day or other, when his imagination is grown cool, and listens to the calmer dictates of his judgment. In the mean while, I would wish the younger part of us to believe, that the generality of our hearers are very little the better for what we say in this manner; and that men of learning and judgment see this kind of composition in a far different light from what We do. Sound reason stands in no need of flowers of eloquence: there is seldom occasion to plead very artfully in defence of truth: and it has often been observed of the two great orators of antiquity, that their colouring was always proportioned to the goodness of their cause.

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FAR be it from me to think *all* persuasion from the pulpit unnecessary. Plain truth, how much soever cried up in speculation, has frequently too small an influence over our practice: and notwithstanding its native comeliness, is sometimes forced to put on borrowed charms, the better to raise our attention. Some degree of persuasion therefore is highly requisite, and what every one is naturally led to, who feels any concern for his fellow creatures. But then, we should endeavour to convince a man's reason, before we apply to his passions; and this cannot be brought about by a shallow, frothy declamation, any more than by a tame, insipid discourse: but by plain, wholesome precepts, recommended with an affectionate warmth, and a cordial sincerity. Keeping clear, on the one hand, of such trivial sentiments, and low expressions, as may lead the world to think contemptibly of our abilities; and on the other, of those cold unnatural conceits, and false ornaments of style, which cannot fail to disgrace the compositions of

a scholar more especially, who ought to have learned a much better lesson, both from the precepts and the examples of antiquity.

As to sweetness of voice, and the persuasive eloquence of harmonious numbers, these are the gifts of nature; and no man can be blamed with candour, whose compositions want these aids, to strengthen and adorn them. Yet, since we all perceive the power of these accomplishments, we should at least endeavour, when we have them not, to warm by other methods of persuasion, in their stead. And let it not be thought, that an ingenuous manner of delivering plain, artless sentiments, is by any means an eloquence of the lowest kind. Certainly it is in itself far superior to the sweetest accents, or the most musical periods: for what can these avail, without good sense? While, on the contrary, the dictates of sober reason, though cloathed in homely guise, and void of all those charms which graceful elocution gives, are sure to work their way to the very bottom of the heart, and make more deep and permanent impressions there than the
highest

highest strains of eloquence: for these do sometimes injure what they were meant to defend; and, like the finer touches of the master's pencil, enervate while they embellish.

THE last observation that I shall make is this; that, in the common course of our ministry, we should carefully avoid preaching upon obscure points of doctrine: such, I mean, as have been long the subjects of controversy, and which, for this reason, we cannot modestly take upon ourselves to explain. More disservice has perhaps been done to the cause of religion in this particular than we are at first aware of. It is by far an easier matter to raise difficulties than to remove them. Weak minds quickly receive such deep impressions as are not soon effaced: and it is at least an act of inhumanity (to say no worse of it) to awaken fears and scruples, which it may never be in our power to appease again. Nothing ought to be pressed upon our hearers as necessary to salvation, but what is clearly revealed. If it has pleased *God* that some parts of scripture

ture should be of such doubtful interpretation, as to become matter of controversy among persons of the best understandings, every man is at liberty to judge of those parts as he shall think proper: but then let him interpret for himself, and not pretend that he is commissioned to fix his belief upon me, or to disturb my peace of mind by a long chain of dark reasonings, which I have not abilities to comprehend. This I will venture to say, that no man's learning was ever called in question for his having adapted his discourses from the pulpit to the meanest capacities: and I am sure that it is the most convincing proof of a sound judgment, and an honest heart.

I HAVE now gone as far as the time will give me leave. And though I have been led, in compliance with the duty of the day, to dictate to those who are better able to dictate to me, still I wish to leave upon their minds the best impression of myself that may be, and to be considered by them as one who is always more ready to take advice himself, than to engage in the painful task
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pointing out the faults of others: and, above all, as one who respects the honest and virtuous of every communion; and who wishes peace and concord to prevail, in a more especial manner, among the sacred guardians of the Christian faith.

THANKS be to *God*! We are strangers to those remorseless feuds and animosities, which have so often divided the ministers of the Gospel, even in this protestant country; the seat of freedom, both civil and religious.— But I mean not to open the sepulchres of the dead — peace be to the ashes of all such angry disputants! And let us take warning by their sad examples.

IN a word; let us dwell together in unity, as becomes the servants of so mild and benevolent a master: paying all due submission and respect to those of our order who are appointed to rule over us: treating the aged among us, with reverence: the young, with gentleness: the weak, with compassion: and the intemperate zealot, with candour and pity. That when, by
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the appointment of Almighty *God*, we shall be summoned out of this world into a better, we may go down to the grave in peace and brotherly love, and wake to the fruition of endless joy and happiness.

F I N I S.



